

FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date: August 18, 2011

Agenda Item: North Shore Flathead wetland conservation easement- endorsement

Action Needed: Tentative X Final _____ Informational _____

Background:

FWP purchased the 161-acre North Shore State Park/WMA in 2008 using Access Montana funds in order to increase habitat protection along the North Shore of Flathead Lake, enhance habitat for wildlife, and provide new, compatible public recreational opportunities on the land that had previously been used for hay production. Our plan for this property was to eventually develop a 25-acre state park site and to manage the remainder of the property for wildlife habitat and associated public recreation. FWP has been working with MDT on a habitat restoration plan that would create wetlands and topographic diversity on this property. FWP has developed a conceptual habitat plan (attached) and MDT has agreed to design and pay for habitat work. In return, MDT needs to secure the wetlands that they create for highway mitigation with a perpetual conservation easement. So FWP is proposing to grant a conservation easement to MDT in exchange for the habitat work on this property.

Public Involvement Process & Results: No public review has yet been initiated for this habitat work. However, there was extensive public involvement associated with the acquisition which was strongly supported by 55 of 58 people that commented.

Alternatives and Analysis:

- 1) Complete the habitat work using FWP funds. This option would avoid encumbering the property with a conservation easement but would require FWP to use our funds to create wildlife habitat proposed when the property was purchased and would require that we contract for the wetland design and construction. It would also miss an opportunity to partner with MDT and would cause them to lose needed wetland mitigation credits.
- 2) Continue to lease the property for crop production and weed control. This could provide FWP with some revenue, but would only provide limited wildlife habitat benefit and public recreation opportunities.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: We recommend that FWP be allowed to more fully develop a habitat restoration plan in cooperation with MDT. Our objective would be to create high quality habitat in an area important to migratory waterfowl, enhance public recreation opportunity, and provide cost-effective wetland mitigation for MDT.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Commission direct FWP to work with MDT to develop detailed plans for habitat restoration and to develop conservation easement language for the North Shore State Park and Wildlife Management Area.



Current cropping plan for the North Shore State Park and WMA



Proposed concept plan for the North Shore State Park and WMA showing a pattern of wetland and upland habitat creation and potential for adding additional water to the property through a system of existing drainage ditches.